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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet on leading discussions is the first of 16 in a series to provide leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material to give practical help in using a method of adult education or working in a particular area. Its objective is to help leaders lead a discussion group or lead one better. Ten articles and how- tos are included. The first and last articles, "Why Group Discussion?" and "Education Through Deliberation," discuss some social and philosophical aspects of discussion. "The Leader's Role" shows how to spread the task of leading among all group members. Four pieces from a longer article by Thomas Gordon are designed to give practical help in working with the group, planning meetings, and improving discussion skills. These include "How Am I Doing?" (a checklist), "Planning for Discussion," "Releasing Group Resources," and "Evaluating Your Skill." "When Books Participate" focuses on how to choose and talk about books in a way to help a group work out its own problems. How to use drama as a kick-off to discussion in educational programs is the topic of "Drama as a Starter." "Are There Any Questions?" suggests practical techniques for how to plan and use question-and-answer periods. A bibliography is provided. (YLB)

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Leadership Pamphlet # 1

A practical aid to leaders in educational, governmental, welfare, health, farm, religious, industrial, community and other groups.

HOW TO LEAD DISCUSSIONS

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This manual will help you lead a discussion group —or lead one better— by providing

- guides to planning meetings
- ways to share leadership
- program ideas
- evaluation checklists
- selected reading list

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Adult Education Association of the U.S.A

Leadership Pamphlets are prepared and distributed by the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. Each pamphlet provides leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material which can give practical help in using an important method of adult education or working in a particular area with insight and skill.

Pamphlets in this series are:

P1 —How to Lead Discussions
P2 —Planning Better Programs
P3 —Taking Action in the Community
P4 —Understanding How Groups Work
P5 —How to Teach Adults
P6 —How to Use Role Playing
P7 —Supervision and Consultation
P8 —Training Group Leaders
P9 —Conducting Workshops and Institutes
P10—Working with Volunteers
P11—Conferences that Work
P12—Getting and Keeping Members
P13—Effective Public Relations
P14—Better Boards and Committees
P15—Streamlining Parliamentary Procedure
P16—Training in Human Relations

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Try This Experiment To
Test Your Skill in Listening

Next time you find yourself in a situation where you have become involved in a controversial discussion with another person, stop for a moment and make this suggestion. Suggest that both you and your "adversary" adopt a ground rule to be followed throughout the remainder of the discussion. *The rule:* Before either can make a point or express an opinion of his own, he must first restate aloud the previous point or position of the other person. He must restate in his own words (simply parroting words does not prove that one has *understood*, but only that he has *heard the words).*

This restatement must be accurate enough to satisfy the speaker before the listener can be allowed to speak for himself.

What Changes Did You Notice
In The Quality of the Discussion
When You Tried This?

INTRODUCTION

If you want to lead a discussion group—or to lead one better—this pamphlet is designed for you. The articles and how-to's included originally appeared in ADULT LEADERSHIP, official publication of the AEA. Here they have been shortened and adapted for easier use.

To be a successful discussion leader you may feel you will need to know a lot about whatever your group is going to discuss. Franklyn Haiman's article, "The Leader's Role", will help you to see how you can spread the task of leading among all the members of your group.

The various pieces by Thomas Gordon, all excerpted from a longer article, are designed to give you practical help in working with your group, in planning your meetings, and in improving your discussion skills.

Are you looking for some suggestions for book-based discussion? John Walker Powell writes on how to choose and talk about books in a way to help your group work out its own problems.

Would you like an effective way to alert your group to social and community problems? Allan V. Atkins tells how to use drama as a kick-off to discussion in educational programs.

Maybe the discussions that worry you most are those question-and-answer periods which follow a speech or lecture. Do they have to be an anti-climax? Can you plan for question periods that will elicit what most of the audience wants to know? Leland Bradford says you can and gives some practical techniques for how to plan and use them.

You probably want to be a discussion leader partly, at least, because you believe in the discussion method. You may believe in it as a useful way of keeping democratic attitudes alive. You may believe in it because you have been stimulated and helped to change your ways or increase your understanding by belonging to a discussion group. You will be interested in what two practitioners of the discussion method say about ways in which group discussion is important and needs which adults seek to meet as they talk things over together. Ida Stewart Hill and Wayne A. R. Leys discuss some of the social and philosophical aspects of discussion in their articles, "Why Group Discussion", and "Education by Deliberation".

WHY GROUP DISCUSSION?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S remark that youth is too good a thing to be wasted on the young could be paraphrased to describe the way many people feel about education. One of the significant social phenomena of our time is the increased interest and participation of adults in educational pursuits.

It may seem paradoxical that men and women who have finished their formal education and who admit that they have forgotten much of what they learned in school, anyhow, should meet with others in groups to study and learn. It may be that, through maturing, man learns enough about the world, its people, and its problems to be uncomfortable in ignorance. He believes, perhaps, that education will qualify him to participate in his society more constructively.

Increased knowledge, however it is gained—through books, lectures, or films—is a worthy goal. It can be gained through discussion also. Probably, however, increasing their knowledge isn't the only motivation for people who join and continue in discussion groups. What is the "plus" which draws them to discussion in preference to solitary study?

Many educators would say that people acquire the knowledge they seek better and in a more lasting and meaningful way if they can talk about it with others.

Many students will agree that this is so and will add that it is more stimulating and enjoyable as well. If we examine what lies behind both sets of attitudes we may have a better understanding of the potency of the discussion method.

More than Knowledge

In a very real sense teachers of children and youth have a captive audience. Much of what children are expected to learn, they are told, will come in very handy when they are old enough to work, to vote, to marry.

Members of adult groups have worked, have voted, and have married. They are not being taught by someone who has lived more than they. They have, ready made, the

kind of motivation that teachers of the young break their hearts trying to create.

Through discussion a group of adults can explore a subject and find a level of working and talking that has meaning for them. And they can obtain satisfaction through the excitement of achievement at any age if the goal is considered worthy of the labor it demands.

No teacher is wise enough to sense what is in the minds of adults, what their needs are, what they think they want to learn. He must try to discover their motivations by listening to them. People who are learning what they want to learn will be loyal to, not truant from, their groups.

A poem can have many meanings, a world crisis a multitude of causes, a social problem a variety of solu-

tions. When the learner is exposed to the range of ideas that can be brought to bear on any subject by the members of a discussion group, that subject is enhanced and broadened. Rather than one point of view, he has many to examine, to compare with his own, to accept or reject. The mental exercise is stimulating.

The years of experience that have built the resources and ideas the adult brings to the discussion group have resulted, as well, in attitudes and biases that are in need of re-examination and change. As long as these remain private and unacknowledged, the person can manipulate and distort new ideas or knowledge to fit them. Once he expresses his attitudes in words, and gives others a chance to examine them, it is much more difficult for him to deny them himself. A mind cannot remain completely closed when its contents are shared.

An important aim of education in a democracy is to produce citizens who are interested in the challenging problems of our times and who will participate in solving them. Many people refuse to be concerned with these problems because they have come to feel that the individual is too insignificant to do anything about them. Overcoming this kind of apathy is difficult. A member who sees his fellows in the group trying to understand these problems, seriously concerned over the solutions, and feeling responsibility to act, may be stimulated to try also.

The people who promote discussion groups can justify them with these arguments, and there is experimental evidence for some of them. But adults don't give up their precious leisure and take part in discussion groups for these reasons alone. Let us look at some of the reasons why people get more fun and satisfaction from discussion groups than from other kinds of class settings.

Fun and Satisfaction

Some people admit that, although they genuinely want to learn, it takes a group to jar them out of their mental laziness. Once they have committed themselves, have assumed some responsibility for a group by becoming a member of it, they cannot let the group down. Thus, a feeling of membership in the group, added to their

initial motivation, produces a higher order of preparation.

In our modern urban society some people find themselves isolated—unable to find human companionship on anything but the most superficial level. Man is a gregarious animal. He needs to feel that he is important to others—that they care about him as a person. A discussion group where the members learn to talk freely together and find areas of common interest and concern can help to meet this need.

It is tragic that we have among us in a democratic society people who have not experienced the satisfaction that comes from advancing an exciting idea or a creative insight. There are people who feel that all the ideas worth having are in a book or in an expert's head. In a stimulating discussion where people listen to each other carefully and critically, where members are expected to have ideas of their own, and where people try to understand each other, this attitude can be quickly dispelled.

Human Relations Skills

Before a person can be expected to participate in the solution of problems existing in his job, his family, or his society, he must have some confidence in his competence both in having ideas and in expressing them. He must have analytical and critical abilities as well as creativity. He must know when to look for facts, where to find them, and how to share them with others. He must realize that the others in the situation have needs, just as he has them, to be understood and accepted. He must be able to defend his values, and be willing to modify them. He must know that much disagreement grows out of misunderstanding. He needs skills in all these ways. Adults want to be effective in their dealings with others. A discussion group can give them practice in human relations skills.

Leaders of discussion groups and those responsible for sponsoring the groups are aware of the values this method has for individual learning. They should know, as well, that the discussion group can have many values which are related to the emotional gratification, self-esteem, and personality growth of the members. To be unaware of the latter is to undermine effectiveness in achieving the former. ◇◇

THE LEADER'S ROLE

AN intelligent person, faced with the problem of how to behave in a given situation wants first to make clear to himself what it is he wishes to achieve. Unless he knows clearly where he is going, he is likely to do an ineffective job of deciding how to get there. Where is the discussion leader in a learning group heading? What goal is he striving to attain?

Expressed in its simplest terms, the ultimate aim of the discussion leader in a learning situation should be to gain full status as a *member* of the group by working himself out of the leader's role. In other words, he should seek to develop and distribute among the members of his group the ability to perform essential leadership functions, in the hope that as they become more self-governing he can shed the responsibilities of governing for them—and can thus become more and more himself.

The Leader Becomes a Person

To the degree, for example, that each of the members of the group develops the ability to be more objective in discussing conflicts of opinion, the leader becomes free to cast off his cloak of super-human impartiality and gains the right to have a subjective view. To the degree that each of the members disciplines his own contributions, learning to stick to the point and letting others be heard, the leader can throw away his policeman's badge. To the degree that each of the members exerts some initiative in stimulating personal involvement or provoking hard thinking in the group, the leader need no longer strain himself to be a scintillating dynamo of intellectual genius and social skills. He can become what he really is—a human being.

As rapidly as he can, the discussion leader should confine himself to doing two things mainly, providing

essential leadership functions, if any, in which he and he alone is uniquely skillful, and expressing his own personal views. He must strive to disavow the paternalistic role. This principle applies equally to all phases of his leadership—procedural matters, problems of content, group evaluation and training, the establishment and maintenance of appropriate group climate, therapeutic functions, etc.

In short, our dream of the Utopian group is of one in which every person is both a member and a leader, and will be predominantly one or the other at any given moment depending upon his peculiar knowledge and skills and upon his relationship to the ideas or feelings that are flowing at the time. Each member of the group, in addition to "being himself," bears equal responsibility for the survival and progress of the group as a cooperative team. That responsibility is not the particular domain of one person or of a select few.

What Is Your Leadership Style?

It is possible for discussion leaders to agree on this vision of the ideal group, yet disagree on the extent to which it is realistically attainable and on the methods for working toward it. There are a variety of considerations (or sub-goals) which may cause people with the same goals or aims to set out for their common destination by different roads.

They have first to consider the problem of what is comfortable and healthy for each leader in terms of his own personal needs and characteristics. Some people because of their prestige, ability, age or a compensatory need for dominance may find it impossible to melt into a group as just another member. Some may be able to do it only to a degree.

For some the urge to disappear into a group may be unhealthily motivated. They may react strongly against authority, and their enthusiasm for non-direction may become fanatic or misguided. (This situation may lead to the autocrat in democrat's clothing, who may be subtly more destructive to the group and to himself than is the out-and-out autocrat.) Each person must analyze his own motives as best he can, in an attempt to find a style of leadership which he can carry off with a maxi-

mum of psychological comfort to himself and to those with whom he works.

We have discovered that some leaders believe in transferring responsibilities to their groups through a gradual weaning process. Though recognizing this to be a long, slow method, its advocates also feel it to be the safest, surest and most comfortable approach—for them. Others favor a different style, a sudden thrusting of responsibilities on the group at the very outset. Though recognizing this to be a sharp, unsettling experience, its advocates also feel it to be the fastest, most effective and most comfortable approach—for them.

Training for Responsibility

Another problem to consider is the problem of how much faith one places in the maturity, intelligence, and insight of the members of the groups with which one works. Is it possible for all learning groups to achieve the kind of diffusion of leadership responsibility we have discussed? If so, to what extent can they, and how long will it take? Might it be that some groups can do it and some cannot? Might there be some leadership functions which can be performed by the group at the very outset and others which it can never perform? These are questions which provoke disagreement, and which each person, through experience, through trial-and-error, through controlled research, must answer for himself.

Members' Expectations

A group's *ability* to take over leadership responsibility is not the only consideration the discussion leader must face in choosing his style of leadership. He must also take into account the *desires or expectations* of the group, and the extent to which he can justify frustrating those expectations.

James James, for instance, may be working with a group of people who have learned to like autocratic methods of leadership. Accustomed to a dominant hand at the helm, they prefer to play a passive role themselves. What right does James, as leader, have to thwart their expectations and frustrate their desires by thrusting leadership responsibilities upon them without their consent? On the other hand, if he firmly believes that

they will learn to enjoy and desire more democratic methods after they have experienced these methods a while, how can he live with himself if he caters to their submissive needs?

Should the leader adjust to the group's expectations? Should he expect them to adjust to his style of leadership? Should a compromise be sought? This is a problem which must be decided by each leader in accordance with his own code of ethics and in consultation with the members of his group.

At least two other factors remain to be considered as the leader faces his problem of goals and objectives. One is the time factor. How long will the group in question work together? For one night only, perhaps? If so, the leader must see his goals altogether differently than he would see them were the group to have a series of eight meetings or to meet together indefinitely.

Some discussion leaders feel that for a one-night meeting there is little value in even attempting to diffuse leadership throughout a group. Others might try diffusing leadership to a limited extent. Others might make a concerted effort to do as much of it as possible. I think all would agree that the longer the time the group would work together, the more possible and more profitable group-centered leadership would become.

How Much Freedom?

The other factor to be considered is the perennial philosophical dilemma of freedom versus discipline. To be creative, to progress or grow as a group, the members must be free and spontaneous, unhindered by hierarchy and by arbitrary rules. But to be productive, to get a job done, to protect the group against the excesses of the individual there must be a certain amount of accepted law and order—informal and self-imposed though it may be. A group is constantly called upon to make choices between two essentially conflicting goals. Perhaps not either-or choices, but decisions which involve giving priority to one over the other. The wise leader is conscious of the group purpose, the mood of the members, and his own aims, so that he will sense in any given situation whether a little more freedom or a little more control is called for. ◇◇

HOW AM I DOING?

Checklist of Favorable Symptoms

- ☐ Members address me no more formally than others in group
- ☐ Members frequently express real feelings
- ☐ Group starts itself at beginning of each meeting
- ☐ Sometimes members openly disagree with me
- ☐ Members address their remarks to each other rather than to me
- ☐ Group has a tendency to want to remain after the time limit has been passed
- ☐ Group makes decisions without depending on me as the final judge
- ☐ Members seem to know what goals they seek
- ☐ Members speak up without asking for my permission
- ☐ Members do not count on me alone to handle "problem members"
- ☐ "Bright ideas" originate with many members of the group
- ☐ Different individuals frequently lead the group's thinking, discussion and procedure
- ☐ Members seem to listen to each other without interrupting
- ☐ Conflicts and disagreements frequently arise, but people try to understand the nature of these and deal with them
- ☐ Members often accept insights and information from other members
- ☐ There is an absence of hostility toward me
- ☐ Members draw out and question each other to better understand their contributions

PLANNING FOR DISCUSSION

What kind of preparation is called for from the discussion leader?

A clue to this problem is found in the leader's own definition of his primary function in the group. A leader, for example, who defines his function as influencing the thinking of the group in some direction of his own choosing prepares himself to improve his methods of presentation and persuasion. With this kind of goal in mind such a leader asks, "How can I best prepare myself to influence others, to change others to my point of view, to 'guide' discussion in the 'correct' direction, and to 'lead' others to the real 'truth'."

Freeing the Group

If he sees his function as that of increasing the group's critical thinking, so that its members can learn to reach their own conclusions, he will ask himself, "How can I free the group from dependence upon my ideas?" "How can I facilitate self-directed and independent learning?" "How can I create the conditions for maximum participation of the group members?"

Here are some suggestions for preparing oneself for the role of group discussion leader. They are based upon the experiences of leaders who have been trying to

perfect their skills of releasing the creative potential of the *members* of their discussion groups.

As You Start Work

1. You might try out techniques for getting members to participate *before* the first meeting.

   Send out questionnaires to get information about:

   Members' interests

   Real problems they are facing

   Questions on their minds

   Ask a few members if they would serve on a Planning Committee which might work out a tentative program for the *first* meeting.

2. You might gather the best resources you can find for use *by the group*. Your attitude would be: What can I make available to the group as possible resources for the members to choose?

   Appropriate moving pictures
   Case studies
   Recordings
   Book Lists (selected carefully for pertinence)
   Situations suitable for role-playing
   Possible field trips

3. You might get your own ideas organized in suitable form for use by the group, if the members decide to use you as one of their resources. You need not fear being prepared as well as you can be, just don't let your preparation divert the group.

4. You might want to take steps to insure that the physical resources for the group will be conducive to effective discussion.

   If your group will be large, you might arrange to reserve several smaller rooms for sub-group discussion, in case the group decides to subdivide.

   Try to get comfortable rooms in which the chairs can be moved into a circle or square.

   Remove all symbols of leadership, such as podiums, platforms, gavels, special chairmen's chairs, teachers' desks, lecterns.

   You might bring materials which can be used as name tags.

5. You might feel more comfortable if you planned what you will say to the group at the opening of the first meeting, keeping in mind that:

   The more you say the more you encourage the members to depend on you to carry the ball alone.

   Any hint you give about how they should get started will be only too welcome. So you may not get ideas from the group unless you *avoid having preconceptions* about where they should begin.

   If you *do* think you know where the group should begin, plan your opening remarks to give the members a chance to make suggestions *before you make yours.* Their ideas may be better than yours.

Opening the First Meeting

In the opinion of many who have seriously investigated different types of leadership approaches, the initial contact is crucial in its effect upon the later development

"Let's see what we can do about bringing him back into the discussion."

of the discussion group. What the discussion leader first does, these investigators say, sets up expectations in the group members' minds. If he starts out carrying the ball himself, he will find it hard later to pass that ball to others in the group. If, however, he makes it plain that he is *not* going to take initial responsibility but is counting on the members to determine the group's functions and its destiny, he sets the stage at the outset for the members to learn how to become a self-responsible group.

Many discussion leaders consider this approach too extreme. They call attention to the fact that people are so used to a leader's assuming responsibility for getting the group rolling, that they will resent any attempt on his part "to push this off on the group." It seems like too much of a shock for a group to be told in effect, "It's up to you." Consequently, some discussion leaders feel they have to wean the group away from dependence. Advocates of this approach claim that the leader can only give responsibility to the group in slow and measured doses, depending on the readiness and maturity of the group.

Among experienced discussion leaders, then, there are these two schools of thought. One advocates that the leader *immediately* allow the discussants to take over all aspects of government of the group, the other that the leader gradually transfer this responsibility as the group becomes more mature. The arguments of both schools of thought are plausible. Until we know more, each leader will have to decide for himself which point of view seems to fit with his own experience and with his own social philosophy.

The gradual approach is probably less scary for most leaders. Those who have tried letting the group take full responsibility for itself at the outset caution that the leader must expect some strong reactions from some groups. Often members react with hostility toward the leader, probably from the frustration of being thrown on their own. Some people, if accustomed to depending upon authorities, experts, leaders, become hostile to any leader who is not willing to assume such a role with them. Thus, the leader must be secure enough to receive such hostility, and show real acceptance of the hostile person by not returning it.

Another reaction can be expected when a leader

places the responsibility for initiating activities on the group. This is the pause that leaders so dread—that period of silence immediately following whatever opening remarks the leader uses to convey that it is up to the group to decide how to begin. For example, a leader might say something like this:

> "By coming here we've all expressed an interest in (*whatever topic or problem brought the group together*). I have been unwilling to make decisions how we should approach this problem, feeling that this is something we would want to do together as a total group. So this is where we stand now, with the job of planning ahead of us."

If the group responds with a long pause the leader is put on his mettle. The members are probably somewhat stunned to discover that they have to go to work so soon; each probably wants the others to speak up first. But everyone is mentally scurrying for appropriate ideas—the stage is set for the group to take its first step toward maturity and self-responsibility, if the leader is secure enough to wait out the pause.

Some leaders will want to offer their groups suggestions, alternative plans or procedures. Proponents of this approach, too, are convinced that to be most effective the discussion group must eventually be self-directing and self-governing. But they believe that at first the leader must help the group to accomplish this.

The essential tools for such leaders are techniques for hastening member participation, for example:

(1) Role-playing some pertinent situation that has experiential meaning for the group.

(2) Providing an initial problem for discussion, breaking up into small groups to consider different aspects of the problem and reporting conclusions to the total group.

(3) Asking members to contribute something from their own experience.

(4) Suggesting that the group make a census of the problems members have brought to the group.

(5) Suggesting that each member *introduce* himself. Be careful that this doesn't turn into a status-definition procedure!

(6) Presenting a film, a case study, a provocative problem, the "radical proposition" and so on.

These are only a few of the techniques that some leaders have found useful to them. Undoubtedly there are others equally useful. Again, some leaders, remember, can be comfortable letting the group decide how to begin.

Setting the Emotional Climate

Certainly one of the main functions of an effective discussion leader is to establish the emotional climate of his group. In fact, the behavior of the leader usually has more effect upon the group climate than that of any other member. It is he who to a great extent determines whether the climate will be

Formal	or	Informal
Unfriendly	or	Friendly
Cold	or	Warm
Restrictive	or	Permissive
Rejecting	or	Accepting
Evaluative	or	Non-evaluative

While emotional climate is of importance for any group it is of particular importance for learning groups. This is because the process of human learning is greatly affected by the emotional climate of the situation. Confronted with an idea that is at variance with an old idea, a person must reorganize all of the attitudes, values and concepts that have become intimately related to the old idea. To do this he must feel that it is psychologically safe for him to express these attitudes, values and concepts. In other words, he must feel that he will not be criticized or ridiculed if he expresses opposition to the new idea, if he discusses his doubts or if he defends the old idea. Hence the need for an accepting, permissive, non-evaluative emotional climate in the learning situation.

The discussion leader begins to set the climate of the group during the very first meeting of the group. Here are some of the ways experienced leaders have learned to create a climate that helps learning and re-education to take place in a discussion group.

What Can a Leader Do to Set the Climate?

1. Dispense with unnecessary formalities, such as:

Practice of members having to raise hands for permission to speak;
Stereotyped group procedures, such as standing to speak or addressing the chair.

2. LISTEN attentively to what each group member has to say.
3. Try to set aside your own evaluation of ideas offered by the members.
4. Try to cast aside any private notions as to what the group should be discussing, so that you avoid judging any comment as irrelevant or off the subject.
5. Avoid preaching, teaching or moralizing.
6. Avoid pushing people into participation before they feel like it themselves. Convey the idea that it is safe for members even to refrain from talking.

How about Communication?

Too often we think of communication as simply that which is *expressed* by someone. Communication, however, requires that an *expression* make an *impression* on the listener. We cannot assume always that the meaning of the expression will be identical to the meaning of the impression. Consequently, effective communication between people occurs only when

Expression = Impression

In other words, real understanding of the meaning of a speaker occurs only when the listener's impression is exactly what the speaker intended it to be.

Unfortunately, there is seldom real communication between members of a beginning discussion group. The reasons are many:

People don't always *feel free to say* what they really mean.

The same word has *different meanings* for different people.

We sometimes hear only what we want to hear, with the result that we *distort the meaning* intended by the speaker.

Often we are so busy thinking up what we are going to say next we *don't even listen* to a speaker's words. This is especially true if he speaks immediately before or after we do.

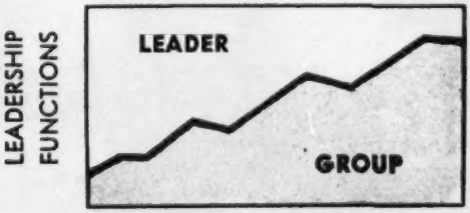
No one can completely put himself into another's

"world of meaning" because he will never have had the same experiences. Though these difficulties make real understanding hard to achieve much can be done to increase the chances of real communication. It is here that the leader can carry on an important function in the group.

First, by setting a non-evaluative, permissive and non-critical group climate he can reduce the tendency of members to be afraid to say what they really mean. This improves the EXPRESSION side of the communication process.

Second, he can conscientiously make an effort to LISTEN attentively to *every* comment. Soon others in the group will follow suit. They will be thinking, "If people's comments are worthy enough to be listened to by the leader, perhaps I should listen." In a way, he will be setting a pattern for listening, or offering a model for understanding.

Third, he can try frequently to restate in his own words the meaning he gets from a person's comment. This is the true TEST of understanding. This is actually checking *impression* with *expression.* It will not be easy at first. The leader will find it difficult to restate another's meaning to that person's satisfaction. But he should give the person a chance to indicate whether he has been understood. ◇◇



The diagonal line represents what happens in most groups—groups which possess some ability to perform leadership functions right at the outset, which grow (with ups and downs) in their abilities as time goes on, but which never achieve a state of completely distributed responsibilities.

WHEN BOOKS PARTICIPATE

I have always believed that the proper use of books for group discussion required continuity: the same people returning week after week to argue their way through one or more challenging books, at whatever speed best suits them and the development of their field of argument. But I have been wondering, lately, just how we could use one-shot readings as elements in a varied program.

In mental health education, for example, the planners usually don't get to plan the whole program, because they are persuading other organizations—PTA's, service clubs, unions, veterans' clubs—to introduce mental health content into some part of an over-all program. The question then becomes: Will the one or two meetings be more effective if they are based on common reading by the members? And I am not going to say "no" before there have been some attempts.

There hasn't been much attempted at all, yet. Chair-

men responsible for one meeting fall back on the familiar: a speaker; a movie. But the fact remains that you can buy some of the best minds of all time for a quarter; and the speaker you'd dearly love to have is usually the one who has already said it in an article or a book. That's why you want him: you know he's said something important. So why not invite him in print?

Now don't all try it at once. There are problems here.

First, think about this meeting of yours. Is it part of a series? Does the series have a plan, a theme? Do the same people come each time, or can't you ever tell who's coming? (I once led three movie discussions on child development for a PTA. here in Baltimore. The first two meetings were to set the question, and the last meeting was to summarize and apply what we'd seen. *Nobody* at the third meeting had been at either of the first two!)

Think about your audience, your group. What do they believe they're coming together to do, to learn, to talk about? Or, as I once remarked about luncheon clubs, is the end for which they assemble merely the one on which they come to rest? No matter; it is still in your power to surprise them into an activity they will enjoy.

If you were inviting a speaker, you would have certain criteria in mind: you'd like him to say one thing, say it briefly and effectively, and by saying it make a contribution to the group's understanding of the subject. You'd like it if the group was stimulated to discuss what he said.

Try Your Corner Drug Store . . .

Exactly the same criteria apply to a piece of reading. It should state a clear proposition (not just facts) in an area the group wants to talk about; and it should be brief. Unlike the speaker, however, it should be easily and cheaply available in multiple copies. And, since the writer is not there in person, it will be up to the group to lead their own discussion. They cannot take refuge in asking questions of him; they must ask these of themselves and of each other—a far more trustworthy source of growth in wisdom.

Hardest problem of all: How do you know anyone

will do the reading? Particularly if you're not sure who's coming! I can make some suggestions here, and you, knowing your crowd, will think of others. My notion would be to suggest something that everyone is likely to have, or can get at the drugstore; send out your notices to everyone but don't expect everyone to come; and specify, in the notices, just what section (or book) is going to be read, and what it's for.

Example: The group is a mothers' club, a fathers' club, a church group, a teachers' association (teachers don't have clubs, you'll notice), a young people club, a—oh, you name it. Let's suppose its members are parents, and that one of their expressed concerns is with phases of parent-child behavior.

So what book do they all own already? Spock. *The Pocket Book of Baby and Child Care*, by Benjamin Spock, M.D. Now, don't go upstage on me. If every parent in America assimilated Spock's way of looking at children's development and behavior, we'd have healthier people for generations to come, clear across the board. Now

look in the Table of Contents. Page 327: "Trouble with Lessons." Page 473: "Separated Parents." That's followed by sections on "The Working Mother;" "The Fatherless Child." Page 484: "The Handicapped Child."

How many pages in a section? Two to ten. Factual but fresh, not trite. Want other references—in case the group gets interested? Consult your library; get them from your State Mental Health Association, the National Association for Mental Health, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor.

All right, how do you know they read it? How do you get them talking? Most of them are bashful, and they're not used to discussion based on reading. So quiz them—not a test on the reading; they are not "going back to school." But say, two fact questions and a thought question, as our kids in school are taught to call them. Maybe you've chosen pages 291 to 294, on children's fears. Fact question 1: Children fear nothing until they

are *taught* to: hands for true, hands for false, explanations and discussions; you yourself can refer back to the book if no one else does. Fact question 2: Children will outgrow their fears if you ignore them briskly: hands for true and false. The meeting will be getting hotter; examples of "my child" and "my childhood" will need to be kept from taking over. Remember, an anecdote doesn't prove a point, it only illustrates it; the job is to find out what *proposition* is being asserted through this illustration.

The antidote to testimony and reminiscence is the thought question: for example, When parents meet a child's fears by *denying* that he has them, or that he should have them, or even that the whole area he's afraid of really exists, are they just *confirming* his fear by revealing theirs?

Too complicated? All right. Our group is a men's lunch group, and you're the chairman. So you tell them, the month before, to get the February issue of *Galaxy* and all read "Project Hush," by William Tenn. (One club chairman I know had it mimeographed and sent it out by mail.) In this science fiction short, the Army goes to such enormous lengths of secrecy in building a Moon rocket that when they get there and find another expedition already there, they discover that their successful competitor was—no, I won't tell you. But put the problems of secrecy and scientific competition to these men, and lead on with your thought question to the problems set for University faculties by the presence of "classified" research on their campuses, so that their freedom of speech is threatened from the same source that supports their institutions: you won't have a dull meeting.

Let me make another point about the content. If it represents a continuing interest of the group, you'd be silly not to suggest that your meeting be preceded or followed by another kind of presentation of related material: in the Spock case, say by the film, *Fears of Children*, which dramatizes a case from much the same point of view.

Let me quote the good doctor himself: "You must also remember that a child can't learn anything from one telling. He learns a little at a time, and comes back with the same question." This sounds belittling to adults;

but *don't* we keep coming back, to ourselves as well as to each other, with the same questions? The game of intelligence is an endless conversation, and we violate the rules when we think we can package our answers into discrete program units.

What to Read?

What kinds of reading materials, generally speaking, might be good in this sort of program use?

First, they needn't be as short as the ones I've suggested. A group might very well tackle an article in *Harper's* or the *Ladies' Home Journal*. I think a whole book, even pocket size, would tend to reduce sharply the number who'd read it by meeting time. But you can take the most pointed chapter—if the book is widely available. Our public libraries have to satisfy so many tastes for titles that they can't afford very many copies of each title. And anyway, sad though I think this is, we are pretty much a hand-to-mouth culture so far as reading goes.

Second, you may, if you can't predict your attendance, have to select something that (a) you can have copies of for everyone, ready when they come, and (b) you can have someone read aloud while the rest are following with their own copies. That "own copies" factor is important: discussion by ear alone goes astray readily, but if you have the print under your own eyes you avoid trivial misunderstandings and are more likely to see something really important that your mind's ear missed while you were calculating how late you'd be getting home.

Third, my own tendency is to avoid pamphlets intended for just this kind of discussion. They are so blamed dispassionate that they can't unlock the passion that real intelligence burns for fuel. They make you understand why the Athenians banished Aristides when they got tired of hearing him called "the Just." The discussion guide, like Tiresias in *The Wasteland*, has "foresuffered all;" it dims the elation of discovering the relevant points for ourselves. Worse, it tends to make the leader feel that a good discussion is one that covered *all* the items listed in the guide, rather than one that involves a number of people in new discoveries about themselves and each other and the fun, not of making points, but of

discovering them.

Still, there are Public Affairs pamphlets and others you can get hold of. *I* think they rather tend to make the group feel self-conscious, as though they were improving themselves instead of enjoying themselves in the use of their natural powers. So I would recommend taking your materials from the marketplace or from the great, from the people who *live* in the area of interest rather than the guides who know only its geography.

A Rule to Grow By

The best rule I know is: Get the others to read something about which you yourself are excited. You know I don't mean to be a bore; but something hits you effectively, makes you want to think or to disagree; there's no guarantee that others will react the same way, but in your presence, if you react, so will they.

Do you know the Penguin and Pelican books? Is your crowd made up of men who like to talk about character and action? Take a look at Xenophon's *The Persian Expedition* in the Penguin translation.

Read Mark Twain recently? *The Mysterious Stranger* is in the Viking Portable edition, and it'll hit you harder than you expect.

You'll have noticed that I assume, in all this, growth and learning materials intended to activate the discussant, rather than cultural or informational materials. If all you can say is, "Is that so!" or, "Isn't that so!" you can have no interaction.

Finally, let me say again, discussion built on common reading is habit-forming; and it works best only when it builds on continuity of membership, continuity of themes. Then, people learn to read *for* the discussion, which is a little different from just discussing what they were asked to read. But if your one-shot reading-based meeting goes well—and it has stronger chance of it than a meeting based on almost any other medium of community—you may be in a position to suggest that next year the group try it a little longer, with a plan and time to try it out, maybe four to six meetings in a row. Then, I promise you, you'll be on the high road to a group experience that calls on all you've got, and gives you back even more than you had. ◇◇

DRAMA AS A STARTER

A NON-PROFIT SERVICE of the professional Broadway theater, the American Theatre Wing Community Plays has developed a series of plays for educational programs on topics ranging from family relations to international relations. These plays can be used as special material for a regular meeting of a group, or as a means by which the group can carry its message to the community.

The plays are carefully designed to serve as discussion-starters, and can be counted on to create an atmosphere which makes people ready to discuss. Discussion guides, which are part of the printed scripts, include general comments and suggestions useful to inexperienced leaders. They also include special references to particular parts of the play and to points of interest from which discussion might be expected to originate.

The recent experience of a large New York City welfare agency illustrates the use of these plays as a springboard to introduce discussion to a group previously unfamiliar with it. The agency wished to help the members of a group with which it works build more cordial

relationships among themselves. Various programs were considered. A series of American Theatre Wing community plays was decided on.

Although some question was raised about how readily the audience would accept discussion, the agency staff decided to plan for a discussion period. The staff made certain, by means of a preliminary conference, that the discussion leader knew what the audience would be like and what the agency hoped to gain from the project.

At this conference questions were raised about whether any special arrangements should be made to help the leader get discussion started. The final decision was to use no artificial aids, but to rely solely on the skill with which the plays were written and the adroitness of the discussion leader. This decision proved sound. The possibilities, although not fully realized at the first play, were obvious. The vital discussion which followed the second play justified that confidence.

A Spark For Discussion

Smaller groups, more closely knit, will find the same two basic ingredients—a good play plus discussion

—quite as practical.

"The Room Upstairs" may be used as an example. Its subject matter is of universal and increasing interest —the problems faced by so many families where old people and young people live together. Like all American Theatre Wing community plays, it can be put on easily by the members of any group or organization interested in a special evening, for its own membership, or with a few guests. Putting on a play is fun, and program chairmen should have no qualms about asking members to take part.

Enough copies of the script must be obtained for the cast, the director, and the discussion leader, and these can be bought as a producing packet. The time, place and date of the showing should be set to allow two to four weeks for rehearsals, assuming that the cast will be able to devote only spare time.

The group's regular meeting place should suffice, unless an expanded audience is sought. The playing space can be anywhere from 10′ by 15′ to a full stage. The latter, or some elevated platform, is desirable for large groups. Small groups often use a space in the center of the room with the audience surrounding it in a full circle. This "arena style" seems to make the audience feel more relaxed and gives a feeling of intimacy which means that discussion starts more freely. Props are never a problem. For "The Room Upstairs" they consist only of one small knitted square to represent the start of an afghan.

All regular announcements, written and oral, should mention the play. There is no need to be bashful, even if the cast is inexperienced. Many amateur plays are, to put it mildly, something less than inspired, but these plays were written by Broadway experts for just this kind of inexperienced performance.

For Community Programs

These measures can be expanded for larger audiences. A federation, such as a PTA Council or a church, might wish to use a play to attract members, or stimulate inactive members. Or a number of different organizations wishing to join hands for a special occasion might use such a play to draw public attention to a problem of common interest. ◇◇

RELEASING GROUP RESOURCES

One way of describing the discussion leader is as a resource person for his group. This term refers to the special skills, insights or information he may possess that others do not have. Often, however, we overlook the fact that the leader is not the only resource person in the group—in a very real sense, every member is a potential resource person. It takes time and considerable effort for a discussion leader to create the conditions whereby group members learn to consider each other as resource persons, and to draw on the special information and experience that each brings to the group.

That which will contribute most to this objective is the discussion leader's own attitudes. If he sincerely believes in the members' potentialities for making constructive contributions, if he does not believe that he always knows best, if he is himself willing to learn from others, if he does not have a strong need always to be seen by others as the expert, and if he is willing to have his knowledge and experience tested against those of others—then he has a real chance of releasing the group's own resources. He may find it helpful to try out some of the methods which other discussion leaders have used successfully:

A Group Has Many Resources

1. Before imposing your resources on the group, wait until the group defines its problem and begins to seek pertinent resources.

2. Convey to the group that your resources are ones they

might want to use rather than ones they *should* use, provided, of course, you really believe this.

3. When the group has defined a problem for discussion, if you feel it is necessary for you to call for resources, you might ask, "What resources might *WE* bring to bear on this problem?"
4. Consider yourself as one who is working for the *group*, insofar as the members request to use your resources. How different from most learning situations where the "students" usually think of themselves as working for the "teacher"!

It should not be interpreted that a discussion leader need not have any special information or skills, nor that he need not prepare for his leadership role. On the contrary, it will be most beneficial to the group if the leader (or any member of the group, for that matter) can make creative contributions to the topic of discussion. If a leader has had experience with many groups, he will probably be a special resource person on matters of group procedures and methods of increasing group efficiency. The problem remains, however, as to *when* the leader gathers his resources. If he does a lot of planning before the group meets, it is obvious that he can plan only on the basis of a diagnosis of the group's needs or its goals. In this case, there is the danger of a poor diagnosis or the danger of influencing the group (consciously or unconsciously) to select only those goals for which the leader's prepared resources will be useful. Consequently good advice for the discussion leader who plans ahead is:

(1) If possible, find out from the members what problems they may wish to discuss when they come together as a group. This will help you to diagnose the group's needs for resources.

(2) Prepare resources in the light of your diagnosis of the needs of the group. (Keep in mind that the group may be overawed by seeing you appear with reams of material.)

(3) Be prepared for the group to decide to discuss some problem for which your resources would not be appropriate. ◇◇

EVALUATING YOUR SKILL

The Tape Recorder

A tape recorder is an aid to improving one's skills of leadership. As so many group leaders have said, "You don't really know what you do as a discussion leader until you actually record a meeting and listen to yourself afterwards."

Here are some things that can be done with a tape recorder:

(1) Ask your discussion group if you may record one of the meetings so that you can improve your own leadership skills.

(2) Listen to the recording yourself, at first, to see what you can learn just by listening to your own comments in the group.

(3) Ask other discussion leaders to listen to the recording with you. Invite their comments and criticisms. You may not agree with them, but you'll find the discussion will start you thinking.

(4) You might find the following suggestions useful in evaluating your leadership role:

Listen particularly for your immediate responses to statements of others. How often do you:

Disagree with them?

Evaluate the worth of their ideas (either positively or negatively)?

Add something to what they have said?

Use the phrases: "You should . . .". "You ought . . .", "You need . . .", "You must . . .", "Why don't you . . .", and so on?

Listen to get an estimate of how often it is you who are suggesting things for the group in comparison with others.

Listen to see if it is you alone who is keeping the discussion "on the subject" rather than

others in the group.

Discounting the times you simply restate or reflect exactly statements made by members, do you talk more than a proportionate amount of time in the group?

Do you sound like a teacher, a lecturer, an expert? Or is your voice pretty much the same as it would be at an informal social gathering?

(5) Listen to a member's statement, then shut the recorder off and try to write down an accurate restatement of the point he was making. Do this enough times to get the feel of how difficult it is to *understand others accurately.*

Use of Observations

Having someone in the group who is devoting his attention to the process of discussion can be a real aid to the leader. Frequently leaders suggest that their groups select an observer who reports back to the group about its procedure at the end of the meeting.

Some leaders have found it helpful to ask another discussion leader, or simply a close friend, to sit in as an observer on the first meeting for the sole purpose of evaluating the role played by the discussion leader.

Others have asked the group to take a few minutes at the end of the meeting to give their observations about the meeting.

The leader may ask each member to fill out anonymously a brief end-of-meeting reaction sheet on which have been printed such questions as:

How did you feel about the discussion?

What were its weaknesses? Its strengths?

Did you get any new ideas or understandings?

Did you feel people tried to understand each other?

Did you feel understood?

How would you rate your learning?

Learned a lot
Learned a little
Learned almost nothing

What were your reactions to the discussion leader? Did he facilitate or block discussion? How? ◇◇

ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?

THE important, imported speaker concludes with his final and most telling point. He sits down amidst applause. The chairman hopefully announces, "We have ten minutes left for discussion. Who would like to start off with the first question?"

An embarrassing silence freezes the audience. Finally somebody, to save the speaker's feelings, raises his hand and timorously starts off with the first question. A few half-hearted queries, touching only remotely and deferentially on the topic of the evening, follow. And the meeting is over. Only occasionally and accidentally do the questions represent the thoughts in the mind of the audience. The questions they really would like to have answered are seldom raised.

Meetings which promise much lose their impact. Everybody concerned is vaguely, disturbingly disappointed. Speakers, program planners, chairmen—and audiences—lose faith in the question-and-answer period.

To be effective, meetings must overcome problems of communication, problems of putting information to work, and problems of collecting information to use in planning future meetings.

Problems of Communication

No matter how polished a talk may be, unless it overcomes obstacles to communication in the listener it will fail.

Some of the important obstacles include: 1. The listener's logic may not be the speaker's logic. A series of statements that makes sense to one, may not make sense to the

other. 2. There is the problem of talking over the heads of the audience; or of talking down to them. 3. No one remembers everything. What each listener hears and remembers is largely the result of his own interests, experiences, and needs. Listeners may miss important parts of the talk, and come out with incomplete or inaccurate knowledge. 4. Not all people or groups absorb information at the same rate. They will be frustrated if they get too much too fast, or bored if they get too little too slowly.

As if these obstacles to communication were not enough, a speaker can never assume that people are anxious to hear what he has to say. They may resist listening for fear that as a result of learning something new they will have to change in some way (and to change is always harder than not to change). Some people in the audience may resent the speaker's looks, or his voice, or his personality. Some may be hostile because of his position, or dislike him because he is identified with a person or organization they object to. Or the whole audience may be unfriendly because the previous meeting was boring, exhausting, or irritating.

Definite methods must be developed to locate and overcome these obstacles to communication.

Here is a major task for the question-and-answer period: to find out the problems of communication in a particular group so that they can be met.

Problems of Using Information

Too often people assume that if information is given logically and clearly, it will inevitably be used. But there are even more difficult obstacles in the way of getting information used than in getting information understood.

One big obstacle is that information has to get inside, be thoroughly absorbed by a person before it can be easily used. He may hear and understand an idea and still not accept it, still not make it a part of himself. For example, a person may *know*, and be able to describe, all the attributes of a successful parent and still not *be* one. Or he may be able to tell how to give a good speech and not be able to give one.

Some of the obstacles to communication of information are also obstacles to its use. If the listener does not hear or remember important parts of the information, or if

he resists change or has hostilities to the speaker he may not make use of the information.

Another difficulty is that information is usually given in a way to discourage active thinking. The speaker tells; the audience merely sits and listens. Little effort is made to get the listeners to think.

The question and answer period can be used to overcome these obstacles and help people put new knowledge to work. Here are some of the things that question and answer periods can do:

1. Check whether the information was understood and remembered.
2. Correct misunderstandings and misperceptions.
3. Uncover gaps in knowledge that need filling in.
4. Discover some of the resistances that members of the audience have.
5. Test the extent to which they have related the information to their needs.
6. Give them a chance to discuss, and thus begin to use, the new information.
7. Provide an opportunity to re-emphasize main points, and to summarize again.
8. Indicate the kind of further help, if any, the audience will need actually to use the information.

Problems of Getting Information

The main obstacle here is neglect. The question and answer period can provide important information to help in planning better meetings in the future, as well as show what more should be done for those attending this meeting.

Analysis of the questions asked and reactions from the audience indicating their interests, attitudes, and learning, can be used in planning later meetings. Several questions relating to taxes and appropriations in a meeting on foreign policy might suggest a future meeting on economics, or the foreign aid program, or other subject areas. Program planners, who always worry about "What do people want?" can find many hints in the question-and-answer period.

Questions also indicate the feelings of the audience. The questions may show whether or not the members like this kind of program, and whether they feel satisfied or

feel that this subject is unfinished. The questions asked also provide information on the background and understanding the audience has in the subject. For example it will show if they are familiar with the concepts and terminology of child psychology, or if they understand a particular industrial process or know the county zoning regulations. Questions reveal areas of special interest, and areas of hostility, prejudice, apathy and ignorance. Maybe a lot of members don't know, don't want to know, and don't want to talk about modern art.

Planning Effective Question Periods

Most question periods achieve only a small fraction of what could be accomplished. This is because there is no clear understanding of how to plan and use them. Question and answer periods should: 1. Be a fundamental part of the total meeting, not an afterthought. 2. Be tied in with the whole meeting, not just tacked on at the end. 3. Do a "pinning down" and "mopping up" job for the first part of the meeting, tying up loose ends, summarizing, and clarifying any issues that still remain. 4. Help the members of the audience see how to use what they've just learned. 5. Reveal how much of the program really got across, show audience interests and reactions, and indicate what the audience wants next.

Step 1. Getting the Audience Set

Preparing the audience for critical listening is a crucial factor in developing effective meetings. Such preparation needs to:

- Help the members of the audience listen to the program in terms of specific areas of questions that should be answered.
- Give standards, or examples of types of questions that will be pertinent and significant (and not irrelevant or embarrassing).
- Make them feel comfortable in raising questions.
- Set the standard that everyone asks questions.
- Start the preparation early enough so the audience can have opportunity for careful thinking.

Here are some methods that can be used to stimulate critical listening:

Sample Questions

Before the speaker is heard, the au-

dience can be given sample questions that will stimulate other questions.

Briefing

The members of the audience can be reminded ot the particular purpose of the meeting, and briefed on what to listen for

Outlines

An outline of the most important things to listen for. Problems, issues or questions that will be discussed—can be printed or mimeographed, or written on a blackboard. Such an outline, of course, should be suggestive. not restrictive.

Listening Teams

Another fruitful device is to divide the audience into listening teams prior to the talk. The chairman can indicate, for example, that those on the right side of the room form one team, those in the center another, and those on the left, a third. Or he might divide them by rows. Each team listens for particular points. For example, at a church club meeting or a social

. . . "Are there any other questions?"

agency staff meeting or a Farm Bureau meeting, one team might listen for "points requiring clarification." A second team could listen for "things we question or disagree with." And a third team could listen for "things we ought to do something about."

Role-playing

may also be used before the speech to bring out areas in which the group is interested, the problems and issues the members feel are important, the questions they want answers to. Such a discussion by a few members of the audience can help the speaker sense audience needs, backgrounds and interests, and can stimulate the rest of the audience to start thinking critically about the subject to be covered.

A panel discussion by representatives of the audience could do much the same thing, or a demonstration interview could be used. Or buzz sessions might be staged at this point in the meeting, rather than after the speech.

Step 2. Getting Questions Down

The questions that occur to people in the early part of program, are often forgotten by the end, and important points may be missed.

Notebooks or Cards

Notebooks or notepads can be provided, or cards can be passed out so members of the audience can write down questions as they occur to them. Then they can ask the questions after the speech or the questions can be collected and quickly sorted so they can be systematically answered in a logical sequence.

Breaks

Sometimes two or three breaks during a speech are planned to give members a chance to write down their questions without missing part of the speech.

Audience Reaction Panels

To help make sure that the audience doesn't get lost, an audience reaction panel composed of two or three members can be used to test whether the speaker is really communicating with the audience. The panel could interrupt the speaker to raise questions which the members feel need to be answered to clarify the speech.

Step 3. Getting the Most Important Questions

Getting questions that are really representative of the

total audience is important.

Buzz Groups

Even though people have been helped to listen critically, some may still have difficulty formulating and expressing the questions that bother them. Hearing other questions and discussion usually helps individuals to crystalize their own. Breaking a large audience into small discussion groups (buzz groups) for ten minutes can help people frame their questions, and insure that every person takes part in the question period. Such groups of six or eight people can be quickly organized in a large meeting, either by asking people to move their chairs, or by asking three people in one row to turn around and talk with the three people immediately behind them. Then one person in each group can report their conclusions or questions to the audience and the speaker.

Small Group Discussion

Another way to get at the questions the audience feels are important, is to select a small group of representatives from the audience to come up and discuss, briefly, what questions seem most important to them. And if anyone disagrees, he can say so. This helps to give the audience a picture of the range of questions to be covered so they can tell if important fields have been missed. Or, instead of having one question and an answer, then another question and an answer, the leader can write a number of questions on a blackboard to get at this same picture of range of coverage. These last two devices also make it possible to take questions up in groups or categories.

Step 4. Varying the Pattern

It is not necessary to have a speaker answer all the questions himself. Sometimes it is not desirable.

Audience-Speaker Panel

A panel made up of the speaker and members of the audience adds to the sense of audience participation, and may result in a more thorough treatment of major questions.

Interviews

An interviewing technique is frequently more effective than asking the speaker to respond in a relatively rambling way. The speaker or panel can sit on one side of the platform; one or two audience inter-

viewers on the other. The questions coming from the audience can be used by the interviewers, who help the speaker, through discussion and follow-up questions to pin down and make more concrete his answers.

Storing Questions

All questions cannot or should not be answered in one meeting. Some questions can be collected for future meetings. By means of blackboards or sheets of newsprint on the wall, questions can be recorded and audience members will not feel they are merely being put off, but that the questions they raise will be a fundamental part of the next session.

Step 5. Getting Results

Will people use what they've learned or just forget about it? Audiences can be encouraged to relate the meeting to their jobs or their daily life. At the end of the meeting two or three audience members can hold an interview on the platform to discuss ways they see of using what has been learned. This will help to reinforce latent tendencies to use information and to crystallize possible ways of using it.

Program Planners Can Learn from Questions

The kind and tone of questions are highly symptomatic of the effect of the meeting. The planners can listen critically to the questions, noting such points as: 1. The extent of communication from platform to the audience. Was there misunderstanding or lack of understanding? 2. Are audience members making an effort to apply what they have heard? Are the questions irrelevant or to the point? 3. What is the feeling tone of the audience? Is it one of extreme criticism or hostility? If so, is it toward the speaker, the subject, or the organization? Was there evidence of cliques or hostilities within the audience? Do the questions indicate the meeting is serving audience needs and interests?

By analyzing such matters, meeting planners can improve future meetings by doing a better job of preparation. They can learn how to achieve greater involvement of audience members in the meeting, how the presentation of information can be improved, and how to improve the whole handling of the question-and-answer period. ◇◇

EDUCATION THROUGH DELIBERATION

Below is the concluding section of an article, which in its long form was devoted primarily to reasons why adults are interested in the kind of liberal education sponsored by evening colleges. What the author says in the following excerpt, however, is applicable to discussion groups in general.

Leys' experience has led him to believe that adults who want to "talk things over" are not so much interested in gaining knowledge or in being entertained as they are in acquiring a "particular kind of rationality". The development of this kind of rationality is, he feels, a "positive goal of adult education".

If the objective of adult education is not scholarship and not primarily entertainment or propaganda, what is it? In different vocabularies, I believe, many adult educators are saying that the objective is a contribution to rationality of a sort that may be called "civic religion."

By "civic religion" I mean the cultivation of intelligent attitudes towards events that otherwise tend to emotionalize the citizen. It is a process of sharing experiences so that passionate, subjective impulses are restrained. The goal is not necessarily agreement on plans of action, but a common orientation, a fairly objective understanding of the problematic situations of life.

Many adults have a strong desire for this kind of rationality. It is not an interest in knowledge for its own sake. It is rather a desire to "talk things over." It is a desire to clarify thoughts, not as scholars clarify things

in precise formulas, but rather as advisers untangle worries and muddles, clearing away irrelevances and meaningless coincidences. The adults who feel the need for such clarification may welcome a new thought, not because it is an idea, but because it jars them out of a mental rut. They may even be provoked into reading a book, not from a pure love of knowledge but from a desire to escape the fears, obsessions, and boredom of their predicament.

The group discussion people say that adults need to become objective, but this is not the scientist's objectivity of pure disinterestedness. It is objectivity in the sense of a control over passions, in the sense of a remembrance of considerations forgotten in the heat of battle. It is objectivity in the sense of a mobilization of all relevant knowledge that one has previously acquired and now needs to bring to bear upon a confused moment. It is seeing all of the angles. It is study that is not directed toward an abstract end-result, but a focusing of abstractions and all available resources upon some stimulus to insanity or stupor.

If adults are short of time and yet need to criticize their own reactions, what is available to them in our heritage of liberal arts and sciences? The standard college course is much too long; and, in many instances, it offers little that helps the adult to test his aroused attitudes. On the other hand, there are quarters and sixteenths of standard courses that are quite suitable for adult education. This was recognized by the organizers of the Great Books movement. They have made available many discussable essays which ordinarily are buried in a forbiddingly long college course. Whereas an adult is likely to bog down in a course on American literature, he may find great profit in the section of that course dealing with one author, say, Thoreau. Thoreau's essays meet both specifications: they are within the adult's time limits, and they evoke strong attitudes which can be examined in discussion.

These specifications are satisfied by other units of instruction besides the classics of philosophy and literature. A survey of political science, as presented in a standard university course, may contain many barren interludes for the adult, but not so a short course on the

TVA or an intensive study of the city manager fight in Cambridge.

In recent years there has been a development in university education which makes available a great many materials that are suitable for adult study. I refer to the case method of teaching, as practised in the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and the Inter-University Case Program. In this kind of education, a class or discussion group reads a "case," a narrative which begins with the description of a problematic situation in which any action taken will be debatable. Starting with a complex and partially unanalyzed event rather than with a set of principles, discussion tends to reach out for information and ideas that can be used in interpreting the event. In the process the members of the group will probably react emotionally as well as intellectually with resulting opportunities for mutual criticism and self-criticism.

Any good library contains many "cases" that will provide materials for the kind of striving toward adult rationality that I have called "civic religion." Professor Irving Lee made a collection of such materials, beginning with Taylor's narrative of "General Patton and the Sicilian Slapping Incidents," published by Harper last year under the title *Customs and Crises in Communication*. Several years ago in like manner I located many cases, helpful in the study of ethics, in autobiographies such as Henry Ford's *My Life and Work* and Mohandas Gandhi's *Autobiography*.

How far the case method of teaching will be carried in collegiate and professional education is not yet evident. Its use is not even limited to the humanities and the social sciences, for it is being tried by teachers of the natural sciences. Quite possibly, "cases" will prove to be of no use in some subjects and merely supplemental in others. The accumulating experience of the past few years leaves little doubt, however, that an important educative function is performed by study which begins with the consideration of imperfectly analyzed incidents. Such study improves the ability to think under stress, to increase resourcefulness in deliberation, and reduces the tendency for "book learning" never to be applied.

In describing the claims of the case method of teach-

ing we virtually repeat the description of adult education as a kind of "civic religion." For this reason it seems that adult educators may find in the growing literature of case instruction a rationale and a briefing for the experts whom they invite into their programs. They will ask the experts to select instructional materials that are less voluminous than college textbooks, not because the objective is mere entertainment, but because most of the adult students do not have time to become scholars. They will prefer the controversial short piece, not because of a desire to propagandize, but because—with proper direction—provocative materials may help adults to escape the power of unthinking habit or free them from the passionate impulses that are generated in our irritating civilization.

In briefing the teachers of adults it has been customary to cite Thorndike's evidence that learning ability does not deteriorate after the normal school-leaving age. However true Thorndike's contention, its reiteration encourages scholarly teachers to expect that adults will behave like schoolboys learning various subjects. The learning process is the wrong model for understanding such liberal education as the time limitations of most adults permit. The deliberative process is a more appropriate model, and I have tried to emphasize this by calling liberal adult education by the name "civic religion." ◇◇

FOR FURTHER STUDY

HANDBOOK FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS, by J. Jeffery Auer & Henry Lee Ewbank. New Revised Edition. New York: Harper & Bros., 1954. Step-by-step procedures for planning, organizing, and leading public and group discussions.

LEARNING THROUGH DISCUSSION, by Nathaniel Cantor. Human Relations for Industry, Buffalo 2, N.Y., 1951. For the experienced leader who wants to understand basic processes underlying discussion.

CREATIVE POWER THROUGH DISCUSSION, by Thomas Fansler. Harper, 1950. Discusses characteristics of a good group member, a good leader, and good group thinking.

GROUP LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC ACTION, by Franklyn Haiman. Houghton, 1951. Practical suggestions for achieving democratic group discussion.

DEMOCRACY THROUGH DISCUSSION, by Bruno Lasker. H. W. Wilson, 1949. Examines discussion in the democratic process, the logic of discussion, and discussion procedures.

HOW TO TALK WITH PEOPLE, by Irving J. Lee. Harper, 1952. Principles for "preventing troubles that come when people talk together."

DISCUSSION IN HUMAN AFFAIRS, by James H. McBurney and Kenneth G. Hance. Harper, 1950. The nature, logic, and purpose of discussion.

GROUP THINKING AND CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP: TECHNIQUES OF DISCUSSION, by William E. Utterback. Rinehart, 1950. How group thinking may be put to work in community, classroom, and industrial discussions.

"A Manual for Discussion Leaders and Participants." Community Services in Adult Education, Box 42, Bloomington, Indiana. 1954. Principles of discussion in outline form for quick reference.

"Teachers Prepare for Discussion Group Leadership." Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953. Report of a one-day training workshop for inexperienced discussion leaders.

FILMS

DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE. Available from United World Films. Shows various discussion methods.

ROOM FOR DISCUSSION. Sale or rent from Encyclopaedia Brittanica Films. Illustrates good discussion procedures for group members.

HOW TO CONDUCT A DISCUSSION. Sale or rent from Encyclopaedia Brittanica Films. Dramatizes principles of discussion leadership.

ORGANIZING DISCUSSION GROUPS. Sale or rent from Encyclopaedia Brittanica Films. Shows steps in forming discussion groups.

INTRODUCING THE AEA

The AEA (Adult Education Association of the United States of America) is a non-profit organization founded in May, 1951, as an instrument for developing a united adult education movement. The general purposes of AEA, as stated in its Constitution, are:

—"To further the concept of adult education as a process continuing throughout life.

—"To promote and develop adult education in the United States by affording opportunities to professional and non-professional adult educators to increase their competence and by encouraging and assisting organizations and agencies . . . to develop adult education activities and to work together in the interests of adult education.

—"To receive and disseminate information about adult education.

—"To promote the balanced development of educational services for adult persons in the United States.

—"To cooperate with adult education agencies internationally."

United in the AEA to further these purposes through a program including field services, conferences, publications, and public relations, are over 12,000 men and women who work with adults in formal and informal educational and training programs. These leaders represent every sector of American society—education, labor, agriculture, industry, religion, social welfare, government service, and a host of voluntary associations.

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